

Reward your ears: Five gadgets to liven up your music

August 24 2016, by Ron Harris



This Tuesday, Aug. 23, 2016, photo shows the Electrohome Archer Briefcase portable turntable, in Decatur, Ga. The unit has built-in speakers and a headphone jack if the user wants to listen in private. A USB port on the front lets the listener play music from a flash drive with song files. (AP Photo/ Ron Harris)

Open your ears. What do you hear?

If you're listening to music coming out of the tinny speaker on your phone, you're not hearing much. And inexpensive Bluetooth speakers or flimsy earbuds aren't much better, as they fail to give you a proper spectrum of [sound](#) that your music deserves.

Instead, reward your ears. Consider quality Bluetooth speakers, finely crafted headphones and even a portable turntable for vinyl on the go, if analog is your thing. Here's a look at some nice gear to consider:

FOR A FULLER SOUND AT HOME

The \$500 Fluance Fi70 is the beefiest Bluetooth speaker you'll likely come across. It sits on the floor, comes up to about waist-high and isn't something to tote to the beach. Though the Fi70 is big, it has a nice wood finish and an eye-appealing shape and design.

The Fi70 sports dual 8-inch woofers to push those low-end sounds out powerfully. It filled my living room and well beyond when I connected my phones and tablets wirelessly. It also worked well as a speaker for my TV on movie night using wired connections.

A remote control lets you shape the sound, adjust the volume and change songs. Or you can use the touch-sensitive buttons on the top of the speaker.



This Tuesday, Aug. 23, 2016, photo shows the Fluance Fi70, a large Bluetooth speaker, in Decatur, Ga. The 80-pound speaker can be connected wirelessly to a smartphone or tablet and puts out a combined 280-watts of amplified sound. (AP Photo/ Ron Harris)

The Fluance Fi70 is a solid choice for those who want the ease of Bluetooth connectivity, but desire a balanced output range that does your music justice.

SEXY SPEAKER FOR THE BOOKSHELF

If you want to pump your music to a Bluetooth speaker that looks like professional gear at a concert stage, the \$230 Marshall Stockwell speaker is for you. It carries the Marshall brand, but is separate from the

company that makes performance gear common at concerts and studios. Still, it's an eye-appealing nod to rock's roots.

As for sound quality, dual woofers and tweeters do a nice job at separating the sound and delivering an above-average tonal range.

Separate knurled knobs for volume, bass and treble are recessed into the speaker and pop up at the touch of a finger. The Stockwell also has an input port for devices without Bluetooth.



This Tuesday, Aug. 23, 2016, photo shows the Marshall Stockwell Bluetooth speaker, in Decatur, Ga. Separate knurled knobs for volume, bass and treble are recessed into the speaker and pop up at the touch of a finger. The Stockwell also has an input port for devices without Bluetooth. (AP Photo/ Ron Harris)

EXCELLENT SOUND OVER THE EARS

The \$250 Lola headphones separate the players from the pretenders. Blue Microphones makes gorgeous equipment for the discerning ear, and it's come through again with the Lola .

These are over-the-ear headphones—not earbuds you stick into your ear. The fit is so well thought out that it adds to the experience of listening to music through them. The earcups have pivoting arms so you can adjust both the height and angle over your ears. The result is a better fit and sound delivery.

The Lola's performance exceeded those of rival headphones that cost about \$100 more. I found myself gravitating toward a lot of better recordings, both digital and vinyl, to take advantage of the quality sound reproduction. I didn't want to waste my junk pile of pop music on them.

These are zero-mistake headphones. Well done.



In this Tuesday, Aug. 23, 2016, photo, Nighthawk headphones from Audioquest lie on display, in Decatur, Ga. The headphones require 150 hours of "burn-in" time before the audiophile-grade components are properly adjusted and broken in for optimum listening. The earcups are made with renewable raw materials and then injection molded to give a liquid wood appearance. (AP Photo/ Ron Harris)

FOR AUDIOPHILES ONLY

You know who you are. You need all the gear your friends don't have.

The \$600 Nighthawk headphones from Audioquest aren't for everyone. You're not going to want to jog or mow the lawn with them, or do anything to get them sweaty, or worse. These are for times you simply want to hear music faithfully reproduced using the best gear you'll find

for this price.

The headphones are so meticulously crafted that you have to play 150 hours of sound through them first just to get the components properly seasoned. It took me a couple of weeks to get that done, though it sounded fine out of the box, too.

The diaphragm—the part that vibrates to create sound—is made of a bio-cellulose material. Audioquest believes the more commonly used Mylar material creates a false sense of detail for high-frequency sounds. These [headphones](#) are full of little details like these. Audioquest seems full of people who spend a lot of time fretting over quality.



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Your ears will thank you. Your wallet? That's another matter.

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VINYL IS BACK

Face it. You need a little vinyl in your life.

To that end, a multi-component system will eat up half your living room. For \$100, the Electrohome Archer Briefcase portable turntable will handle your basic needs without breaking your budget. It's a full turntable, built into a briefcase with speakers. It's a self-contained way to pack some LPs for a road trip, or simply listen to them in various rooms around your home.

A headphone jack lets you listen in private. A USB port lets you temporarily succumb to the digital age by plugging in a flash drive with song files. The speakers aren't huge, so you won't be waking up the neighbors with your vintage vinyl Led Zeppelin collection. It's not meant for loud parties, but more of a personal experience for the small space.



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